

Made from Mrs Johnsons copy  
by Horace R. Bailey,  
HISTORY OF BRADFORD CHURCHES

1782----1910.

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S y n o p s i s .  
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Baptist church built - - - - - 1789.

Earlier preaching.

Town church - - - - - 1793.

Preaching before this.

Methodist formed - - - - - 1798.

Church built - - - - - 1832.

Congregational church formed - - 1810.

Goshen church built - - - - - 1833-4.  
(oldest building)

Call for society issued - - - - - 1805.

West Bradford, Methodist - - - - 1841.

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For most of my data I make acknowledgment to  
McKeen's History of Bradford, to Mrs. Ellis McDuffee,  
Hon. H. C. McDuffee, Hon. J. C. Stearns and others.

Mrya Burbeck Johnson.

March, 1910.

The first preacher of whom there was any record was Stephen Royce, a Baptist, who is known to have officiated at the funeral of Capt. Samuel McDuffee in June, 1781. In 1785 or 6 a Mr. Rice took his place. Both of these men seem to have preached only to those of the Baptist denomination, and evidently that form of preaching did not appeal to the majority, as the matter of securing preaching came up in another way.

In 1782 the town, at its annual town meeting, voted money to pay for preaching, but for the next six years the records do not show any established preacher, simply an occasional one when he could be secured. Meantime the Baptist church was gaining ground.

In 1785 Dea. Thomas Rowell of Amesbury, Mass. settled on the Thomas Johnson place, buying it in small lots of the "pitch-holders". He was much interested in this church, and in March, 1789, he and Simeon Hoven issued a warning, calling for all interested in hiring Mr. Rice or someone else to come together at his house to decide on the matter of preaching, where it should be held, and if a meeting-house should be built in the ensuing year. This warning is to be found hung in our library building.

The "meeting-house" was built between the cemetery and the home of Mr. Homer McDuffee, the expense being borne by the members of the church. These members came Landaff, Haverhill, Piermont, Newbury and Bradford, some

crossing by ferry, I infer, because one account speaks of the house being near Mr. McDuffee's ferry. The building was a plain, unceiled one, and after services were given up, stood for some time unused, but was at last taken down. Elder Rice once said to his hearers, "You think more of the beams and rafters of this church than of your immortal souls."

The next preacher was Rev. Isaiah Stone, who married Miss Mercy Sawyer, an aunt of Dea. John Sawyer. After preaching here ten or twelve years he was followed by Elder Daniel Batchelder. His successor was Elder Isaac Hall of Newbury. John Rand was the last preacher, for the church disbanded about 1822. The probable reason was that as other churches were formed nearer the homes of the members of this church, they withdrew to worship nearer home.

The names of some of the members of this Baptist Church are to be found in the town records, as it was necessary for them to certify in the following manner, to avoid paying a tax toward supporting the "Town Church."

"I do not agree in religious opinion with a majority of the inhabitants of this town."

"Isaac Stone, Elder.

Bradford, Dec. 15, 1806."

Coming back now to the town preacher, we find that in Sept. 1788, at a town meeting, it was voted to appoint a committee to "drive a stake where to set a meeting house," and in October it was decided by the town to erect a meeting-house, to be set on the flat near Esq. Peters' house, and to the north of it. It was called the "Town Church".

For the next four or five years contention was rife and nothing was accomplished. The site was chosen in 1788, but the building was not begun till 1793 and finished in 1794, not because so much time was needed for laying the foundations of stone, but that the foundations of agreement were of slow growth. All authority was vested in the town and by its vote, pews were sold in advance to defray expenses. A contract, strong and binding, was made with the carpenters, Joseph and Edward Clark, relatives of Laban Clark, mentioned later, and among other conditions were these:- "Said house to be well finished, well glassed, well underpinned, with hard stone, with good hard door-stones --- said house with a steeple with a good weathercock --- the workmanship in every part to be equal to Newbury." It was probably the steeple that made them cast anxious eyes toward Newbury, for Morse's geography tells me that the

Newbury church steeple was the first one in the state! This church had the high pulpit and sounding-board and, like all churches of its time, no heat. It had two porches, a high one for those driving and a low one for pedestrians.

In October, 1793 it was "voted to hire some preaching this fall if some candidate should chance to come this way." Mr. Gardner Kellogg "came this way", was employed and paid by the town. He stayed nearly fourteen years, but the manner of supporting a minister by town taxation at last proved a failure, so many giving notice of belonging to another denomination and claiming freedom from taxation.

In 1809 a committee requested Mr. Kellogg to leave, which he said he would do when his salary was paid. The selectmen were allowed to make up a tax of \$483., to be paid by those not exempt by law, and settled up with him. There is no record of calling a council, nor of any ecclesiastical action, but the pastorate was terminated and this was the close of the life of the "Town Church".

Going back to 1798, we find the Methodist Episcopal church was formed, and by 1800 had thirty members. The beginning of this church centered around the Peckett

family, or, to be more exact, round "Mother Peckett" , Mrs. Giles Peckett - who for three years before her marriage in England was housekeeper and church helper for John Wesley. She was a woman of good education, refinement, zealous for the best in life, and a staunch Methodist. Her influence has not yet ceased to be felt in town nor in the world at large, for it was largely through her influence that a Class was started, and of the first five members, the three men became ministers. In fact, there went out from this small district six ministers; and from the church in this town no less than twenty young men who went into the ministry. Among them Laban Clark and Martin Ruter, both known beyond our bounds.

The first preaching was by Rev. Nicholas Snealthen and the first Class was organized by Rev. Joseph Crawford. Services at first were held at Mrs. Peckett's house, then in the school-house near by, and in 1832 a church was built. This was situated south of the Joseph Bliss place, was owned by both Methodists and Universalists and called a "Union Meeting-House." It was used till 1849, when it was sold, removed and used in the village for other purposes and the present church was built. Ten years later this was enlarged and various improvements have since been made, the last one being the addition of a pipe organ . Among the many pastors of

this church have been some of the most talented men of the Conference, who, with their wives, have always stood for the best in our social and religious development. There is also a Methodist Church in West Bradford, set off from this one in 1841. There is no settled pastor, but services are conducted every other week by the Bradford pastor.

It is plain to be seen that there was a spirit of unrest a century ago, as well as today, in matters of religion.

In 1805 the Town Clerk, Andrew Peters, issued a call for "those inhabitants who wish to form themselves into a society to be known by the name of Baptist Society of Bradford" to meet in District No. 4, the Goshen district, as we know it. A society was formed and services were held, but the Goshen church was not built till 1833-4. Elder Rollins was its first pastor. Many Newbury families attended the church, and the New-historian says the building would have been placed on the town line if a level spot large enough could have been found. Removals from this part of the town depleted the attendance and support of this church till it became almost unfit for use. Not long ago efforts were made by Newbury people interested to raise a fund

for needed repairs to make it fit for use during the warm months. Meeting with success, these repairs were made. It is the oldest church building in town, and were it in a more accessible place, would be well worth preserving because of its age and associations, and as a place for keeping things of historic value. Being so far removed from the center of either town, it is useless to try to follow our inclinations.

When land was granted for the township, it was stipulated that 300 acres be reserved for the support of preaching in the town. Evidently because it became hard to pay Mr. Kellogg's salary, the town gave the selectmen authority to give Mr. Kellogg 200 acres of this land to be used in part payment. The other 100 acres were deeded to a committee appointed by the Baptist church, for, having a society and sustaining a preacher, they claimed their right to a share. This committee consisted of one man, Ichabod Collins, as the town record gives it. The 100 acres was sold for \$400, which has been well invested and now amounts to \$2000. I have tried to get an exact account of the changing of this amount from the first Baptist society at its dissolution to the society which still controls it and attends to its distribution. Either records are lacking or I have



not been diligent enough. It is enough for our purpose to know that a committee attends carefully to its safe keeping, that preaching in the Goshen meeting-house is maintained by it during the summer, and Bradford Center and our own village churches have been aided- our churches during union revival services.

By some it is maintained that the starting of the "Town Church" was the beginning of the Congregational church, but I cannot accept that view for these reasons. The Clerk of the Congregational church tells me there are absolutely no records before 1810. There was a lapse of over a year between the disbandment of the Town Church and the forming of the organization of the Congregational church, and then seven members, only part of whom Dr. McKeen says were from the old church, made up its first membership, which shows that if there were a regular church, it could not have been very vigorous. My idea is that disagreement among the church-goers led to disbandment. This is shown by the fact of their being unable to pay the preacher's salary, and also by an extract from our first manual, which says:-

"They agreed to disband --- with a view to the formation of a new church with a more orthodox creed and consisting of members more intimately united in Christian

fellowship."

Also Dr. McKeen says that the Baptists worshipping in Goshen, part of whom probably went from this Town Church, "not wishing to be considered Sectarians, adopted no creed, but the Holy Scriptures."

(I have heard both the names Christian Baptist and Free Will Baptist given as the name of the Goshen church, but am unable to verify either.)

Mr. Kellogg was a Congregtional minister, but all business with him was done by the town and without any proof of a church organization.

As the Congregational church is to celebrate its Centenary next June, we will take 1810 as the starting point of this church. The first five years the church was without a settled pastor, though most of the time there was preaching. Then after his first year of service Rev. Silas McKeen was ordained. With the exception of a few years' time, Dr. McKeen was its pastor until 1866, when, because of advancing age, he felt it best to retire. He served the church for forty-three years.

As a token of their esteem, several of his friends presented him with a life lease of the house in which he had formerly lived and in which all his childred were born. He was a most scholarly Christian gentleman. I much regret that, not having known him, I cannot do him justice.

His theology and ideals were the best of his generation, and men of his type laid our good New England foundation. Today we may differ in our viewpoint, still perhaps it would be well for us, as a people, to keep a little closer to these Puritanical ideals, even though we may not take the same paths to reach them. We look with veneration on the standard he set and the good he accomplished.

It was once said to me that Dr. McKeen of Bradford, and Dr. Asa Burton of Thetford had left an indelible impress on the people who knew them, hence on all this part of the country.

In comparing our early Congregational church history with other early churches, it seems as if we had more than we realized for which to thank Dr. McKeen, in that he had tact and patience to guide the church in its early years, when other churches had constant changes in their pastorates and constant troubles.

Other fine men have followed Dr. McKeen, but not to weary you with details which are fresh in your minds, I will say that there have been fifteen preachers, most of them ordained pastors, during the century, of whom six are living.

The Town Church building was occupied for forty

years. In 1837 this was taken down and reconstructed on the present site. In 1876 this church building was taken for a Village Hall, so I suppose the hall must contain some of the original timbers of the Town Church, built in 1794. During the same year, 1876, the present church was built. Various improvements have since been made, so that there are now two homelike houses of worship in the village.

Both churches have been well remembered by friends by gifts of money, of parsonage and of interior furnishings, both for church and parsonage. The Congregational church has a fund of nearly \$12,000, of which the interest may be used for different purposes.

I will mention the old Communion Service, one of solid silver, given by Capt. Trotter in 1814. In the history of the Trotter family will be found an interesting account of this gift.

Not long ago Mrs. Blakely made us glad by giving us an Individual Communion Service, which today, with our new ideas of hygiene, seems a necessity. She has also presented the church with an oak case, velvet lined and glass covered, for holding the former beautiful service. This has been placed in the corner of the church nearest the bronze tablet given by Miss McKeen in memory

of her father.

Much detail can be added to the later years, for it seemed better to give more time to the beginnings of our church life.